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PROGRESS OF THE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION
PROGRAM IN THE NORTHEAST

A radio talk by H. B. Boyd, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture period, Friday, June 19, 1936, by 61 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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This is a good time, I think, to give some kind of report on the way that farmers in the Northeast are responding to the Agricultural Conservation Program. Giving that report, though, is not as simple as it may seem. We have to catch the figures on the wing; they won't roost.

Farmers keep on turning worksheets in to their county committees; and the county committees hand them on to the state committee. So by the time people in Washington have figured out the total for the region, more worksheets have been turned in to the state committees, and still more to the county committees.

The latest total we have includes all the worksheets that had reached state committees by last Saturday--nearly a week ago. On that date 58,800 worksheets had been turned in.

If we look at that figure in one light, it shows that the program still has a long way to go in the Northeast, for there are about 450 thousand farms in the region. But viewed in another light, the figure shows that the program has gone a long way already.

I believe that results thus far indicate that the Agricultural Conservation Program is fitted to the needs of the Northeast; and that more and more farmers are realizing it, and are taking steps to participate in this year's program. Last year, with the adjustment programs well established and well understood, about 17,000 contracts were in effect in the Northeast. That number represented an even smaller number of farmers, for some farmers had contracts for two, or even three commodities.

This year with a new program, which was started in a hurry, more than three times as many farmers already are listed as having turned in worksheets. It is safe to say that several thousand others have filled out worksheets in the meantime. And time still is left for filling them out.

The worksheet figures, of course, don't mean absolutely that every one who has made out a worksheet is going to measure up to the requirements of the program. They are not contracts in any sense, and they do not bind a farmer to anything. But they are an indication of interest, and I believe they give a pretty good idea of how many farmers are going to take part.

Our next job in appraising the progress of the program is to find out what the figures mean. It's all well and good to determine how many farmers have showed interest, and to estimate how many more will do so. But what then? What are those farmers doing or planning to do? What ef-

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fect will those things have on the condition of the soil of the whole region, and on the farming operations of individuals?

Those of you who want a statistical answer will be disappointed. Counting the worksheets is a job in itself; analyzing every one of them and finding out what each farmer plans to do will be a much longer job. But talks with state and county committeemen and extension people give a pretty good idea of how things are shaping up.

Quite a number of farmers showed interest in diversion; that is, in diverting some of their acres from soil-depleting crops to soil-conserving crops. Doing that qualifies them for Class I, or soil-conserving, payments. Those payments will be made for each acre diverted, up to fifteen percent of a farm's soil-depleting base acreage.

Many of the farmers who have diverted some of their acreage, and a great many other farmers, showed interest in soil-building practices. They have been improving pastures and orchards and hay land; and making new seedings of grasses and legumes, and planting crops to be turned under as green manure. Many have been planting forest trees. They have done those things, or are doing them, in ways recommended by the farming experts of their states, and they have selected the practices that their farms need most.

Those who use such approved practices will qualify for Class II, or soil-building, payments. Up to a maximum limit set for each farm, those payments will be on a per acre basis, and they will cover from half to three quarters of the cash cost per acre. Committeemen and county agents report that farmers are not upsetting their methods of farming, but simply are doing more of the things that they wanted to do, because they know they will get most of the outlay back later in the year.

In the long run those steps will mean lower production costs for each farmer who takes them; and at the same time the nation's land resources are being improved. This seems to be one of the times when self-interest and the general interest go hand in hand.

I want to make it just as clear as I can that the door is not closed on the program for this year. As I said earlier, farmers still have time to study the program, find out how it can help them, and fill out worksheets. It is too late, of course, for many farmers to divert acreage from soil-depleting crops to soil-conserving crops this year; but it is not too late to make good use of many of the soil-building practices. Pasture can be improved, and green manure crops planted. In the fall many kinds of forest trees can be transplanted in most of the Northeast.

I hope that all farmers who have not studied the program will get the details from their county agents or local committeemen, and see what it offers them. I believe that many will find it means an opportunity to cooperate in constructive national effort, and to improve their own farming operations at the same time.